

Civil Society in Iran and women Condition

Younes kakavand

PH. D of sociology, SHAHED university, TEHRAN,IRAN

Abstract

The origins and goals of the civil rights movement, and the reasons of success and failure stories of Iranian women in getting their fair share of power in Iranian society is the main goal of this study .This study is about the Civil Society in Iran and women condition evaluating the inception and progress of Iranian women activities in the process of achieving civil rights. Results shows that Iranian women have not set forth questions about construction of the forms of inequalities, kinds of identities and subject positions within the framework of cultural, ideological or discursive formation of Iranian society. The interactions between kinship/marriage/sexual/inheritance patterns that are linked together are not mostly taken into account in feminist report of women's situation in Iran.

Keywords: Civil Society ,socio demographics, women condition, Political system, *Iranian Feminism*

1.Introduction

Recent decades have seen an explosion of transnational networking and activism, but participation varies widely around the globe.

For studying the growing interactions between the sociological ethos and the world we study the challenge of public sociology in order to engage multiple publics in multiple ways. The dialectic of progress governs our individual careers as well as our collective discipline. The original passion for social justice, economic equality, human rights, sustainable environment, political freedom or simply a better world, have led us to define better way of living in our country. The year 1979 was among the most tumultuous, and important, in the history of the modern Middle East in which the Islamic revolution , one of the most important and influential events in the region's recent history , occurred and after this revolution some Iranian intellectuals pointed to civil society in Iran.

As one of the most important events of the past three decades in the Middle East, the Islamic Revolution not only has sustained itself, but the Islamic Republic which it spawned celebrated its 30th anniversary in February 2009. Civil society is one of those important issue related to better life in the current century and many famous academicians have noticed to this issue in their research career.

This paper reviews the literature on civil society in Iran focusing on the research available both in English and Farsi . This article provides basic information and analysis about Iranian feminists in the civil rights movement framework. It also reviews the relationship between Iranian feminism on the one hand and democratization process and demand for vindication of civil rights of all Iranian citizens as the main issues of this movement on the other.

2.Global Politics and Civil Society

Globalization's effect on social movement mobilization can be seen as parallel to the transformation of contentious politics during the rise of national states 1. In a global institutional setting, movement efforts to shape the practices of a particular government require international legal or scientific expertise, understandings of the rivalries and practices of inter-state political bargaining, and/or capacities for mobilizing protests and otherwise bringing simultaneous pressure against multiple national governments.¹ Activists thus need organizations that can facilitate cross-cultural communication and manage diversity in order to articulate and advance a shared agenda.² It should not be surprising, therefore, to find that social movement organizations devoted especially to transnational level organizing and political action play key roles in global level contentious politics.

Data from the Yearbook of International Associations show that the numbers of active transnationally-organized citizens' groups (INGOs) grew from less than 1,000 in the 1950s to nearly 20,000 in 1992. Within this population of transnational voluntary associations, we find a subset of groups that are explicitly founded to promote some social or political change. Because such groups are more likely to be involved in

1 - Markoff, John. 1999. "Globalization and the Future of Democracy." *Journal of World-Systems Research*<http://csf.colorado.edu/wsystems/jwsr.html> 5:242-262.

2 - Union of International Associations. 2004/. *Yearbook of International Organizations*. Brussels: Union of International Associations, Vol. 2.

processes surrounding social change, we focus our analysis on this smaller set of INGOs,

which we call transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs).⁵ The population of TSMOs has also expanded at a tremendous rate over recent decades from fewer than 100 organizations in the 1950s to more than 1,000 today. At the same time, we see some expansion in the global reach of these organizations as more groups are based in the global South⁵ and as the sector expands to include other groups in society.

However, a closer look reveals that participation in both INGOs and TSMOs varies dramatically across countries, and this is particularly true of countries outside the traditional core of the global economy. Data from the 2000 edition of the Yearbook indicate that core countries of the world system remain the most integrated, while later-industrializing regions are far less active in the international non-governmental and transnational social movement sectors. With regard to the broader population of INGOs, citizens in countries of the global North participate in an average of 2,600 organizations compared to an average of 613 for citizens in the global South. Moreover, there is far less variation in INGO participation across core countries than there is in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries.⁶ While the difference between core and non-core countries for TSMO participation is not as dramatic, citizens in core countries participate on average in nearly three times as many TSMOs as citizens in noncore countries. The average core country has members in 408 TSMOs, while the average outside the core is just 138 organizations.

Citizens of France are most active in these groups, with 553 TSMOs and 3,551 INGOs reporting members in that country. At the other end of the scale of INGO participation are Afghanistan, North Korea and Oman, with an average of just 159 INGOs reporting members in those countries. Turkmenistan has the lowest involvement in TSMOs, with 15 organizations listing its citizens among their members. Of the 25 countries with the most active participation in INGOs and TSMOs, 19 are among the traditional core states. Also included here are Brazil, India, Argentina, Russia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland.

Western Europeans are active in more than 80 percent of all TSMOs, and citizens of the United States and Canada participate in nearly 70 percent of all TSMOs. On the other hand, much of the developing world is less integrated into the transnational

social movement sector, even if their participation has grown during the 1980s and 90s. People from Africa and Asia are active in only about 60 percent of all groups, the former Soviet region is active in about half of all TSMOs, while Middle Eastern countries participate in about 40 percent of TSMOs.

2.1 Socio demographic concepts of Iran :

Iran is one of the few countries in the world where Shi'a Muslims are in the majority. Unlike its Middle Eastern neighbours, Iran is predominantly ethnically Persians (51%) and Azeris (24%), with notable minority populations of Gilakis and Mazandarani (8%) and Kurds (7%). 89% are Shi'a Muslims, while 9% are Sunnis. 2% of the population come from Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian or Bahai backgrounds.¹

Iran's political landscape is definitively shaped by its natural resources: Iran has the world's second largest gas and third largest oil reserves. Yet Iran's plentiful natural resources have not translated into improved standards of living for the majority of the population. In real terms, although the country has not realized its ambition of economic independence, the revolution has provided economic welfare. Rural development has improved people's lives by providing villages with water, electricity, and infrastructure. The essence of independence also referred to the specific relations between the Iranian monarchy and the United States.

Iran has 1% of the world's population and about 7% of global mineral resources.¹ Yet, the country's post-revolutionary economic performance has remained well below its actual potential, due to war and regional crises as well as internal problems such as mismanagement and other ills.

While countries such as Egypt and Lebanon are ruled by secular regimes grappling with Islamist groups, the post-revolutionary Iranian state is constitutionally defined as an Islamist entity, founded on the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (rule of the Islamic jurist). Contemporary Iran illustrates the potential benefits. Domestically, Iran stands at a crossroads between modernity and tradition, reform and conservatism, and democratization and political repression.

1 - Sanasarian, E. (2006) *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. xii-xiii.

2.2 Political system of Iran

Although Iran was never formally colonized, colonial powers exerted considerable influence in Iran in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while the country was ruled by the Qajar dynasty. In 1951, nationalist politician Mohammed Mossadegh was elected Iran's first Prime Minister, and nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (BP), which controlled Iran's vast reserves. With the UK's prompting, the CIA orchestrated a coup against Mossadegh, and reinstated Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as Shah in 1953.

The reform of Iranian family planning policies in the late 1980s led to the stabilization of the Iranian population growth rate at 1.1%, yet the Iranian leaders policy regarding to family planning options in the first decade after the revolution has resulted in a population that is one of the youngest in the world. 70% of the overall population and 50% of the Iranian electorate is under the age of 30.1 Between 1976 and 1991, literacy rates rose from 47% to 71%, and now stand at 79% (male 86%, female 73%). However, unemployment rates are high, significant proportions of the population underemployed, and the country has one of the highest rates of "brain drain" in the world.²

Taking a broader perspective, Esposito and Ramazani's edited collection *Iran at the Crossroads* offers a series of essays on pressing challenges including reform and resistance, evolving ideology, women's rights and foreign policy, by prominent scholars such as Mehrzad Boroujerdi, Mohsen Milani and Fred Halliday.³ Scholar H.E. Chehabi has also produced influential analyses of the Iranian political system, suggesting that "[g]iven the explicitly non-democratic bent of the original Islamic republicans, their claim that theirs was an ideological state, and this ideology's derivation from immutable and eternally valid God-given laws, one would expect their regime to be frankly totalitarian."⁴ However, Chehabi argues that contemporary Iran's political system does not fit the totalitarian model. Chehabi's work also engages with the difficulties associated with carrying out comparative analyses using

1 - Campbell, D. (2006) "Iran's Quiet Revolution", *The Walrus*, September 2006, p. 58

2 -Esposito, J., and Ramazani, R. (eds.) (2001) *Iran at the Crossroads* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan)

3 -Esposito and Ramazani 2001

4 - Chehabi 2001, p. 50.

the Islamic Republic as a case study. Chehabi suggests that “[s]ince much of the top leadership of the Shi’ite religious establishment has stayed aloof from politics, Iran is not ruled by the clergy but by a politicized section of it”, a group he calls the “clerisy”.¹

In “The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, Kazem Alamdari examines how the clergy and other competing, parallel groups sustain a clientelistic power structure in the Islamic Republic. Alamdari argues that the clientelistic system “originated in three major sources—the Shi’a multiple hierarchy of power, the rentier state and numerous financially self-sufficient religious organizations formed after the 1979 revolution.”² Iran’s political structure “is not constructed like a canopy, in which removing the central pole causes its collapse; rather, it is built on many independent, rival, parallel columns of power that hold the system together.”

Similarly, Kamrava and Hassan-Yari argue that the Iranian political system involves two sets of power relations: official, constitutionally-sanctioned institutional relationships, and unofficial relations “existing between and within groups and clusters of powerful individuals and institutions.” Kamrava and Hassan-Yari suggest that the juxtaposition of formal institutions and unofficial factional alliances has resulted in a precarious balance of power, with two main results: “On the one hand, the emergence of multiple centres of power has enhanced the extent and reach of the state in relation to various social strata, thus bestowing it with considerable durability and staying power. On the other hand, the existence of multiple official and unofficial venues for competition has sharpened the tenor and substance of factional rivalries.”³ The original project of the Islamic Revolution as laid out in Ayatollah Khomeini’s works and speeches aimed at a thorough Islamicization of politics, state, society, culture, law, and economy. The period of the Provisional Government led by Mehdi Bazargan (1979 to early 1981)

was marked by an uneasy alliance between extremist-Islamic and moderate-liberal factions.

1 - Chehabi 2001, p. 52. See also Chebadi, H. E. (1991) “Religion and Politics in Iran: How Theocratic is the Islamic Republic?”, *Daedalus* 120.

2 - Alamdari, K. (2005) “The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government”, *Third World Quarterly* 26 (8), p. 1298.

3 - Kamrava, M. and H. Hassan-Yari (2004) “Suspended Equilibrium in Iran’s Political System”, *Muslim World* 94 (4), p. 495.

The former favored a fusion of religion and politics and a theocratic state ruled by the clergy, while the latter advocated liberal democracy and separation of religion from government. The dual and somewhat contradictory nature of the constitution adopted in 1979 reflected that uneasy alliance. The specific conditions under this situation led to a transition to theocracy rather than to democracy.

Between 1981 and 1988, the ruling elite was much more unified, but the government was preoccupied with the war effort requiring ad hoc policies and decision-making. Although the project of Islamification continued, there were other more urgent issues for the government to attend to. As before, the clerical ruling elite differed over a number of important issues ranging from cultural and economic policies to how to interpret the laws of Islam. The clerical-fundamentalist rightist faction, which predominated in the Council of Guardians, supported capitalist economic policies along with strict cultural and social control. The clerical Left, which had the majority in the Third Majlis, supported state control of the economy and limited cultural and social freedom. Given the war conditions, Ayatollah Khomeini had to shift his support from the right to the left and back again.

The postwar reconstruction period (1989-97) witnessed yet another derailment from the original course of the Revolution and the virtual marginalization of the core fundamentalist elite. As a result, the first signs of fundamentalist opposition to the regime appeared in this period. While the traditionalist rightist factions were dominant in the Council of Guardians and the Majlis, a new modernist rightist faction emerged and dominated the executive. The Kargozaran (Reconstructionists) supported and implemented neo-liberal policies of privatization and during the Fifth Majlis elections competed with the Traditional Rightists. Neo-liberal policies paved the way for a degree of social secularization and liberalization, which was obviously disliked by the fundamentalist and extremist factions.

At the same time, the end of war mobilization and neo-liberal policies led to a decrease in state subsidies, greater unemployment, working class unrest, higher inflation, a decline in ideology, the political activation of various social forces, such as intellectuals, journalists and students, and the outbreak of a number of popular mass rebellions (especially in Mashad, Islamabad, and Qazvin). All this paved the way for the victory of the reformist factions (the older leftist factions and a number of

newly rising new middle class political parties) who supported Mohammad Khatami in the 1997 presidential elections.

From the perspective of the core fundamentalist elite, the period of the reformist government (1997-2005) was the sharpest deviation from the supposedly original project of the Revolution. During this period, the reformist parties succeeded in gaining control of the executive and the Parliament in three consecutive elections (1997 presidential, 1999 parliamentary and 2001 presidential elections). On the other hand the core elite retained control of the Office of Leadership, the Council of Guardian, the Council of Expediency, the Judiciary, and the Revolutionary Guards. In the conflict that ensued between the two blocs, the Council of Guardians vetoed 111 out of 297 bills passed by the reformist Sixth Majles in support of civil liberties, political participation, women's rights, ban on torture, press freedom, labor rights, public welfare policies, and so on.

However, no structural change in the political system occurred during this period for a number of reasons. First, there was not much real elite ideological disunity; the hegemonic elite faction continued to control the system. Second, the reformist factions failed to develop strong social organizations despite widespread popular support. The nascent civil society, rising after a long period of social atomization, was itself under constant pressure from the hegemonic factions.

Third, the armed forces were united and loyal to the hegemonic faction in power. The inability of the reformist Khatami government to bring about change led to increasing disillusionment and dissatisfaction among its mainly urban educated middle class popular support base, especially intellectuals, students and government employees.

2.3 Iranian Women and the Civil Rights

The Iranian women have traditionally been deprived of many of their basic rights and have suffered from both male centered ideologies and male dominance that treat women as irrational, child-like and immature, and from widespread discriminatory policies that affect their lives from birth to death. Women's fight for their civil, constitutional and human rights have been in the core of women's movement in Iran for about a century, from the early twentieth century to the beginning of twenty first century.

Women have been one of the most important social groups in Iranian civil rights movement between 1996 and 2000. Iranian female university students, intellectuals,

journalists and political activists have raised the standards of political activism in Iran. Iranian feminists, religious or non-religious, are the noticeable part of these groups of women who formed a substantial portion of the participants within this movement along with male university students, journalists, intellectuals and political activists.

During the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iranian women participated in massive numbers in street demonstrations and expedited the victory of the Revolution but there were not gender differences and gender expectations in the participation and expectations of women during this great massive social event.

After the Islamic revolution, while women's rights in Iran are far from secure, many of these early policies have been revised, and significant gains have been made in many areas. For instance, women's literacy rates have improved remarkably since the revolution, and 63% of Iranian university students are now women.¹

At the university level, women's enrollment also increased, but women were limited in fields they were allowed to study; women were excluded from 69 different fields of studies⁷, mostly in agricultural and engineering majors. Education of Iranian women overseas was conditioned to their marriages while women could and still can get the passport with the permission of their fathers, if not married, and husbands.

3.Iranian Feminism

Feminism for lots of Iranian activist women has been a liberating thought and ideology insofar as it could theoretically and ideologically open doors to other conceivable ways of representing oneself as something else other than identity engraved on individuals by formal ideology and redefining oneself in relation to sex. Feminism was expected to be an emancipatory ideology for some Iranian women who wanted to escape the harshness

Iranian women have been continuously experiencing systematic disadvantages, structural inequalities and institutionalized injustice in their male-dominated society for more than two millennia, forms of injustice and exclusivism that constrain their opportunities and life prospects. These structural inequalities have their roots in essentialist philosophy and theology, despotism, authoritarian political culture, tribal and patriarchal social system, a special mode of (Asian) agricultural production. These factors have interwoven together.

1 - Campbell 2006, p. 62.

The institutional and societal forms of sexism and androcentrism in traditional perspective on women are mostly based on essentialism and less on biologism.

The social structure of Iranian society in post-revolutionary era was not totally ready for execution of a legal system that belonged to a tribal society thirteen centuries ago. Iranian women's political participation, Islamic populism and some social justice policies pursued and executed by the revolutionary governments immediately after the Islamic Revolution helped women to make their case.

Iranian feminists, religious or secular, mostly come from academia and intellectual circles. In this situation, gender and feminist studies were elevated to an academic and scholar level and journals and books on women's issues flourished. Iranian feminist scholars have concentrated on "woman" as a social category and have understood it as a powerless, disadvantaged and controlled phenomenon defined by men. In a global age, the growth of feminist political movement in other nation-states and the presence of Iranian women NGOs in UN conferences on women have given Iranian feminist concerns an increasingly global perspective,¹ and rarely global leverage and presence. Issues such as women's human rights and equality and their expected advantages from economic development have raised questions about how institutionalized discriminations and disadvantages should be understood.

Iranian feminists represent the accumulated grievances and unfulfilled demands of Iranian women.

Iranian feminists, unlike Connell³⁰, do not describe gender as a reductionist process linking divergent social fields to sexual reproduction. A good version of the ideology of women in terms of an essential maternal role can be found in Mottahari's books on women's status in Islamic perspective.²

3.1 The main Iranian feminists argument

The main Iranian feminists argument is about institutionalized inequality and oppression. They think that men's settled ways of thinking have to be disrupted.

1 - Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform* (Gender, Culture and Politics in the Middle East) (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997)

2 - Morteza Motahhari, *The Islamic Modest Dress* (Abjad Book Designers & Producers, 1988); *Nezam-e Hoqouq-eh Zan Dar Eslam (The System of Women's Rights in Islam)* (Qum: Sadra Publication 1978)

However, different groups of women have different thoughts, approaches and analytical explanation about their situation and agenda

3.2 Progress of Iranian feminist's argument

Iran's isolation from other part of the world, including developing and Islamic world, after the Revolution still has its influence on feminist movement to make themselves apart from the world¹. In spite of the growth of feminist political movements in Iran and its universalistic approach, this has not given feminists concerns about a global presence.

Although Iranian women writers have a big stake of publishing novels since the Revolution, they have not created suitable language to facilitate the presentation of their thoughts, experiences and feelings to a larger body of audience. The number of novels published by women and the number of copies sold are not comparable to what men have published and circulated. This is also true about the number of movies directed, TV series made or plays brought to the scene by women.

Iranian feminism shares concerns with other internal liberation movements, i.e. university students and intellectuals, what distinguishes it is its central focus on religious sexism.

3.3 Iranian civil rights movement

Iranian civil rights movement activists are a composition of three different circles of activist students, intellectuals and women who all are non-violent political activists and their circles overlap by one another.

3.4 Demands for social reform

During the 1990s, demands for social reform increased and some development from below started taking shape. The attitude of the young generation regarding pre-marital relations and divorce changed; the rate of divorce started to increase from about eight divorces out of 100 marriages in 1988 to 12 divorces out of one hundred marriages in 1996. Increasingly young women were demanding equal decision rights with their husbands in family affairs.

3.5 Demands for employment

1 - Haleh Afshar, *Islam and Feminisms : An Iranian Case-Study* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1998); Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London: Zed Books Ltd. 1999)

In employment, women were still not at the level they were prior to the revolution (13 percent) but got very close at 12 percent. Women made up more than 50 percent of university students, although the authoritarian camp began campaigning for a cap on the percentage of women in the universities¹. Access to informal media has also had an impact on the attitude of the younger generation. In this period, religious women put a lot of pressure on the government to change some of the women's legal problems in the area of family.

3.6 Women after reform movement (1996)

Women played a central role in years after 1996 in the reform movement that then led to domination of the reformists in the Iranian parliament, municipalities and presidential office. Numerous studies have established the importance of interpersonal networks for successful movement mobilization⁴⁷. These links and ties are mediated through preexisting community institutions and organizations. Universities, independent media and public and private offices are mediators or social locations of interpersonal networks for mobilization of Iranian women in the civil rights movement. Women have a considerable number in these three kinds of institutions: more than 50 percent in university students⁴⁸, about 20-30 percent in independent media (my guess) and about 30 percent in governmental sector.⁴⁹ Women's share of employment was 12 percent in 1996.⁵⁰ Unemployment rate for college-educated women increased from 4.7 percent to 22 percent in the period of 1997-2002. During the reform movement, Iranian feminists saw gender as an exclusionary construct that shapes the substance, development, sustenance and outcome of the civil rights movement.

4.Criticizing Iranian feminism

Scholars and intellectuals have begun to criticize Iranian feminism. This can help activist women to engage in public debates about the goals and issues of women's movement. These criticisms are founded on different concerns and subjects. Some of the reformers believed "men are equally oppressed" and excluded from leadership and public initiative by rentier and clientalist state, despotic government, and authoritarian political culture like women. They rejected this idea that "men in general are

1 - roozonline.com/archives/2007/01/001911.php (accessed 4 February 2007)

advantaged by current social structure” and think of it as a myth. These reformers saw men and women as subjects constructed by and subject to the cultural and historical discourses within which they must operate. They accept that there are some little gender differences, but they are ignorable compared to other differences based on class, kinship, ideology and power.

4.1 Events of the Sixth Parliament

Reformist-led Sixth Parliament, elected in 2000, passed many Iranian feminists’ drafts that were directed to vindicate women’s rights and their status,. As an example, Iranian feminists hailed a bill giving divorced mothers the same custody rights over boys as girls, passed by the Sixth Parliament. This bill was a small step forward in removing existing discriminations against women. Iranian feminist have been trying to modify discriminatory laws, using the opinions of the more enlightened Islamic scholars. If approved by the Guardian Council, a conservative body that vets legislation, the bill would have granted women custody of both boys and girls until they reach seven (instead of two for boys), in cases the court would decide on which parent has custody. Although some prominent religious scholars gave the bill their support, the Guardian Council reject it.

5. Civil Rights Movement Colored by Feminism

Iranian women have had lot of achievements after the beginning of the civil rights movement of the 1990s. Muslim Iranian women from different political factions and with different political agendas are reinterpreting Islamic ideology to offer a female-friendly reading of theology and shari’ah. Their discourse has emphasized weaknesses in the male domination ideology. The women’s issues gained a new significance and the politicians could no longer ignore them.

Although Islamic shari’ah does not explicitly prevent women from being as leader of prayers, women have not traditionally and officially able to follow other women in their prayers. The employment of women as leaders of congregation prayers and the head of other women during prayers held at schools constitutes a major development.

Iranian reformists introduce the change in religious practices as a victory for women's movements in Iran where women challenge the traditional male privileges in politics and in the clergy.

In spite of institutionalized oppression, women's NGOs have been active to change the conditions. Sometimes the official policies on women have wavered where restrictions were located on the fault-lines. Women NGOs pressure on government has pushed it to re-adjust some discriminatory decisions like abrogation of the pre-revolutionary Family Protection Act. The level of gender discrimination and segregation enforced completely vary with the locale, women's political power in the region and whether women's voice can be heard in those realms of restrictions.

Rarely are Iranian women given credit for their successes in the West including their candidacies in municipality, parliamentary and presidential elections based on their courage in demanding an end to discriminatory treatment in the 1980s and 1990s. During the elections in 1990s, Iranian women voted en masse for candidates with the most liberal views on women, young people and children issues. Discussions about women's participation in party politics and occupying governmental positions as an alternative to mass participation in demonstrations confirming governmental policies came to the scene before the election of the Fifth Parliament (Majles). During the national municipal elections in 1998, a considerable number of women, in small villages as well as big cities, stood for election - many successfully. Moreover, like many Middle Eastern countries, women's education levels are rising at a much faster rate than men's. The rate of literacy for women has always been increasing in the 1980s and 1990s.

Many of these gains are attributable to the efforts of Iranian women politicians and civil society leaders, and have been examined in-depth by a number of authors, particularly Iranian women scholars working abroad.

villages as well as big cities, stood for election - many successfully. Moreover, like many Middle Eastern countries, women's education levels are rising at a much faster rate than men's. The rate of literacy for women has always been increasing in the 1980s and 1990s.

Many of these gains are attributable to the efforts of Iranian women politicians and civil society leaders, and have been examined in-depth by a number of authors, particularly Iranian women scholars working abroad.

6. Conclusion:

There are groups in Iranian women camp that do not welcome men's involvement in this kind of study and activism. This behavior is based on the categorization of "woman" as opposed to "man". There is also almost no public discussion about the strategies of feminist movement; even the literature that women's activists have produced does not reflect strategic thinking on feminist movement. Iranian feminists are so engaged in praxis that do not have enough time or concern about thinking on strategies and policies of the movement. The configuration of feminists' involvement in social activities does not open the doors for further thinking and elaborating the

policies and strategies of this movement. There is not even a system and network of information gathering and monitoring the violations of women's rights in Iran.

Iranian women have not set forth questions about construction of the forms of inequalities, kinds of identities and subject positions within the framework of cultural, ideological or discursive formation of Iranian society. The interactions between kinship/marriage/sexual/inheritance patterns that are linked together are not mostly taken into account in feminist report of women's situation in Iran. These patterns are associated not only with complex forms of stratification, but also with the foundations of state's legitimacy.

Iranian feminist are paying so much attention to universal dominance of men vis-à-vis women, difference between men and women rather than on relations and networks. They are focused only on the empirical work upon the lives and experiences of women in their research, and have ignored other structures of social asymmetry other than gender³⁹. Studies about masculinity are completely forgotten in the gender studies in Iran and have no role in the literature presented by feminists about the other sex.

There are no systematic analyses of the patterns of women's participation in the civil rights movement of 1997-2000. The main question about participation is why women cannot participate more; what is not discussed are about how they can participate more and what are the main obstacles of women's participation.

Iranian feminists mostly isolate gender from other elements of human identity such as ethnicity and class, along with the parallel attempt to isolate sexism from other forms of oppression such as classism, ideology, Shi'ism and mono-ethnocentrism. Due to the evident role of ideologized religion in shaping Iranian society after the Islamic

Revolution, they do not isolate gender from religion⁴⁰ and are aware of ideologized religion as the most important form of oppression.

Reference :

Markoff, John. 1999. "Globalization and the Future of Democracy." *Journal of World-Systems Research* <http://csf.colorado.edu/wsystems/jwsr.html> 5:242-262.

Union of International Associations. 2004/. *Yearbook of International Organizations*. Brussels: Union of International Associations, Vol. 2.

Sanasarian, E. (2006) *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. xii-xiii.

Campbell, D. (2006) "Iran's Quiet Revolution", *The Walrus*, September 2006, p. 58

Esposito, J., and Ramazani, R. (eds.) (2001) *Iran at the Crossroads* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) Esposito and Ramazani 2001

Chehabi 2001, p. 52. See also Chebadi, H. E. (1991) "Religion and Politics in Iran: How Theocratic is the Islamic Republic?", *Daedalus* 120.

Alamdari, K. (2005) "The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government", *Third World Quarterly* 26 (8), p. 1298.

Kamrava, M. and H. Hassan-Yari (2004) "Suspended Equilibrium in Iran's Political System", *Muslim World* 94 (4), p. 495.

Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform* (Gender, Culture and Politics in the Middle East) (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997)

Mortezā Motahhari, *The Islamic Modest Dress* (Abjad Book Designers & Producers, 1988); *Nezām-e Hoquq-eh Zan Dar Eslām* (The System of Women's Rights in Islam) (Qum: Sadra Publication 1978)

Haleh Afshar, *Islam and Feminisms : An Iranian Case-Study* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1998); Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London: Zed Books Ltd. 1999)

roozonline.com/archives/2007/01/001911.php (accessed 4 February 2007)

Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (St. Martins Press, 1996); Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse Univ. Press, 1992)